



AT A GLANCE

Assessing Health Risk Behaviors Among Young People: Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System 2003



"Over the years, the YRBSS has proven to be a valuable tool for providing vital information about the behaviors affecting the healthy development and academic attainment of our nation's youth."

Brenda L. Welburn
Executive Director
National Association of State Boards of Education

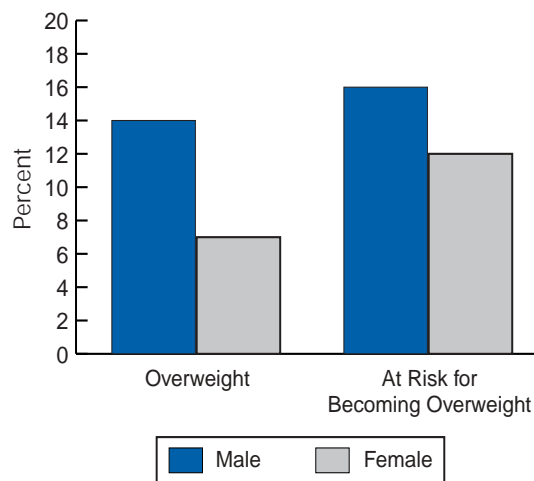
Assessing Health Risk Behaviors Among Young People

Risk Behaviors Are Linked to the Leading Causes of Death

Today, the health of young people—and the adults they will become—is critically linked to the health-related behaviors they choose to adopt. A limited number of behaviors contribute markedly to today's major killers. These behaviors, often established during youth, include

- Tobacco use.
- Unhealthy dietary behaviors.
- Inadequate physical activity.
- Alcohol and other drug use.
- Sexual behaviors that may result in HIV infection, other sexually transmitted diseases, and unintended pregnancies.
- Behaviors that may result in violence and unintentional injuries (for example, injuries from motor vehicle crashes).

Percentage of High School Students Who Were at Risk for Becoming* or Were Overweight†



*Students who were $\geq 85^{\text{th}}$ percentile but $< 95^{\text{th}}$ percentile for body mass index, by age and sex.

†Students who were $\geq 95^{\text{th}}$ percentile for body mass index, by age and sex.

Source: CDC, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2001.

Among both children and adults, the leading causes of death are closely linked to these behaviors. Among adults, chronic diseases—such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, and diabetes—are the nation's leading killers. Practicing healthy behaviors, such as eating low-fat, high-fruit-and-vegetable diets, getting regular physical activity, and refraining from tobacco use, would prevent many premature deaths. Because health-related behaviors are usually established in childhood, positive choices need to be promoted before unhealthy behaviors are initiated or become ingrained.

Collecting Vital Information

Before the 1990s, little was known about the prevalence of behaviors practiced by young people that put their health at risk. The Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) now provides such information. Developed by CDC in collaboration with federal, state, and private-sector partners, this voluntary system includes a national survey and surveys conducted by state and local education and health agencies. The YRBSS provides vital information on risk behaviors among young people to more effectively target and improve health programs.

Using YRBSS Data

State and local health and education officials use YRBSS data in a variety of ways:

- To implement or modify programs to address the behaviors of young people in a specific area.
In New York City, YRBSS data on unintentional injuries led to the development of a program called "Safety Makes Sense."
- To set program goals and objectives and to monitor the progress toward those goals.
In Wyoming, YRBSS data helped in assessing the implementation of health education standards.
- To create awareness of the extent of risk behaviors among young people.

In Wisconsin, YRBSS data were published in the state's medical journal to help educate new physicians about adolescent health issues.

CDC's Leadership Role

To ensure the availability of accurate and current information on health risk behaviors among young people, CDC provides funding and technical support to states, territories, and major cities to conduct a Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS). In addition, CDC supports coordinated school health programs in a number of states to provide young people with the information and skills they need to avoid unhealthy behaviors.

Assisting With State and Local Surveys

With technical assistance from CDC, state, territory, and local departments of education and health conduct a YRBS every 2 years. Sites can add or delete questions in the core questionnaire to better meet the interests and needs of the state, territory, or city school district. School-based surveys were last conducted in 2001 among students in grades 9–12 in 38 states, 19 large cities, and 7 territories. The average sample size of the surveys was 1,819 students.

CDC's technical assistance includes

- Training for state and local coordinators.
- Specialized software to guide states in selecting schools and classes.
- Help with applying survey results to improve school health programs and policies.

Conducting National Surveys

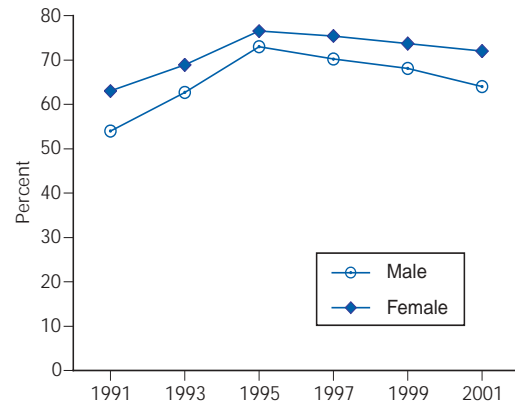
In addition to assisting states, CDC conducts a national survey every 2 years to produce data representative of students in grades 9–12 in public and private schools in the 50 states and the District of Columbia. The 2001 survey had more than 13,000 respondents.

To provide critical information on health risk behaviors among young people in high-risk situations and those in colleges, CDC conducted additional national surveys:

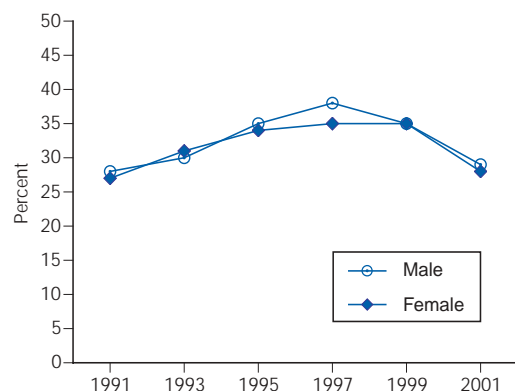
- The National Alternative High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey, conducted in 1998 among a representative sample of almost 9,000 students in alternative schools.
- The National College Health Risk Behavior Survey, conducted in 1995 among a representative sample of about 5,000 undergraduate students. CDC hopes to conduct another survey in 2005.

Results From National Surveys, 1991–2001

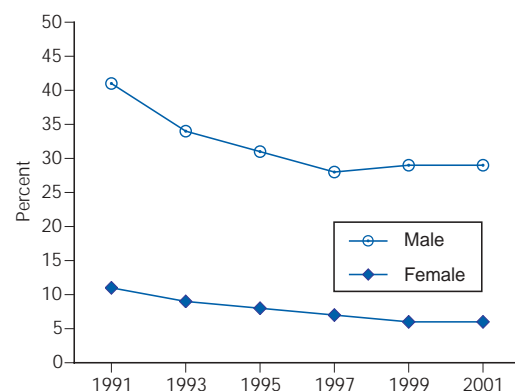
Percentage of High School Students Who Did Not Attend Physical Education Classes Daily



Percentage of High School Students Who Smoked a Cigarette in the Past Month



Percentage of High School Students Who Carried a Weapon in the Past Month



Source: CDC, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 1991–2001.

YRBSS Participants and Uses

Participants in the 2001 YRBSS

These sites conducted their own surveys.

States

Alabama
Arkansas
Colorado
Delaware
Florida
Georgia
Hawaii
Idaho
Illinois
Indiana
Iowa
Kansas
Kentucky
Louisiana
Maine
Massachusetts
Michigan
Mississippi
Missouri
Montana
Nebraska
Nevada
New Hampshire
New Jersey
New York
North Carolina
North Dakota
Oregon
Rhode Island
South Carolina
South Dakota
Tennessee
Texas
Utah

Vermont

West Virginia
Wisconsin
Wyoming

Territories

American Samoa
Guam
Marshall Islands
Northern Mariana Islands
Palau
Puerto Rico
U.S. Virgin Islands

Cities

Baltimore
Boston
Chicago
Dallas
Detroit
District of Columbia
Fort Lauderdale
Houston
Los Angeles
Miami
Milwaukee
New Orleans
New York City
Orlando
Palm Beach
Philadelphia
San Bernadino
San Diego
San Francisco

Purposes of the YRBSS

- Determine the prevalence of health risk behaviors.
- Assess whether health risk behaviors increase, decrease, or remain the same over time.
- Examine the co-occurrence of health risk behaviors among young people.
- Provide comparable national, state, and local data.
- Monitor progress toward achieving the *Healthy People 2010* objectives, which are based on the 10 leading health indicators.

Access YRBSS Data Using Youth 2001 Online

Youth 2001 Online is a useful new tool now available at the YRBSS Web site (www.cdc.gov/yrbss). Youth 2001 Online contains results for national, state, territorial, and local surveys conducted from 1991 through 2001. Youth 2001 Online allows people to

- Create tables and graphs showing survey results.
- See results from national, state, local, and territorial surveys.
- Explore results by race/ethnicity, sex, or school grade.
- Compare survey results for two locations or survey years.
- Create reports that show which behaviors have changed significantly over time.

Future Directions

CDC will continue to help states and cities gather the data they need to monitor young people's health-related behaviors and strengthen programs to promote lifelong healthy choices among youth. In addition, CDC will find new ways to help education and health professionals analyze and use YRBSS data and maximize the survey data's impact on school health policies and programs.

For more information or additional copies of this document, please contact the
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